DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 271 861 EA 018 650

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TITLE The School Support Group: An Innovation in College-Based Consultancy.
PUB DATE Apr 86
NOTE 13p.; In: A State in Action: Working with Schools for Program Improvement. Symposium presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (67th, San Francisco, California, April 16-20, 1986). Session 813; see EA 018 844. Portions of appendix contain small print.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Agency Cooperation; *College School Cooperation; *Consultation Programs; Educational Cooperation; Elementary Secondary Education; Foreign Countries
IDENTIFIERS Australia (Victoria); Victoria College (Australia)

ABSTRACT

The School Support Group (SSG) at Victoria College (Australia) is a joint project of two college organizations: the Centre for Studies in the Curriculum (sponsored by the Department of Curriculum and Teaching) and the Centre for Public Policy Research and Development (sponsored by the Faculty of Business). The SSG provides professional support and services to schools and other educational organizations or groups through the coordinated use of expertise and resources available within the college. Emphasis is placed on providing appropriate assistance to clients conducting their own, locally developed programs and services. This paper reports on the creation and purposes of the SSG, the methods used for marketing its services, the activities it undertook in 1985 (including consulting, hosting seminars, and producing occasional publications), the major benefits it produces for the schools to which it provides services and for Victoria College itself, and some of the difficulties encountered in offering services to schools. Appendixes include a report on the nature, projects, and publications of the Centre for Studies in the Curriculum and an organizational chart showing the SSG's relation to its sponsoring organizations and to the college as a whole. (PGD)

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THE SCHOOL SUPPORT GROUP:

AN INNOVATION IN COLLEGE-BASED CONSULTANCY

John Atkinson

Victoria College - Rusden Campus
Victoria, Australia

EA 018 650

Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the
American Educational Research Association,
San Francisco, April, 1986

THE SCHOOL SUPPORT GROUP: AN INNOVATION IN COLLEGE-BASED CONSULTANCY

In 1977 staff of the Department of Curriculum and Teaching of the then Rusden State College (now Victoria College - Rusden Campus) established an organisation called the Centre for Studies in the Curriculum. The Centre was conceived as a vehicle for channelling the involvement of College staff into curriculum research and development activities in a more coordinated and effective way than hitherto. Appendix 1 summarises the goals and policies of the Centre for Studies in the Curriculum and lists its main current and past projects.

CONTEXT

With the progressive publishing of the Ministerial Papers 1 - 6 by the State Minister of Education in 1983-4 and the concurrent enunciation of the Federal Government's Participation and Equity Program it became apparent that individual schools would need considerable support and assistance if the new policies were to be effectively implemented. It was also clear that restricted capacity for government spending on education would result in this need for support being inadequately met from State Department sources. Both a need and an opportunity therefore existed for the directing into this work of some of the considerable pool of relevant expertise in the College, provided feasible means of doing so could be found.

It should be emphasised at this point that in the straitened financial circumstances of the early 80's none had been harder hit than the Colleges - and particularly the amalgamation of four former colleges which had become the new Victoria College. There was therefore no surplus capacity within the College for taking on this support role with schools. Any attempt to do so would have to be both limited in scope and self-sustaining. In collaboration with the Chairman of a new Centre - the Centre for Public Policy Research and Development - within the College's Faculty of Business, key members of the Centre for Studies in the Curriculum conceived of the setting up of the School Support Group (SSG).

SERVICES

The School Support Group is a joint project of the two Centres: an agency for the provision of professional support and services to schools and other educational organisations or groups through the coordinated utilisation of the expertise and resources available within Victoria College. SSG offers professional development and consultancy services tailored to the needs of individual clients. By acting as a broker for the provision of such services it seeks to ensure that the most appropriate expertise is applied to each particular situation and that a high quality of service is maintained. While some College-based SSG activities are organised, the emphasis is on the provision of locally-based programs and services.

MARKETING

SSG services are marketed through VICTRACC Ltd., the College's research and consultancy company. A prospectus was developed to publicise the range of services available. This is available to potential clients who respond to promotion material forwarded through Ministry of Education regional mailings or promulgated in other ways. Fees for services are set at a realistic level which reflects the actual costs of providing the services. Staff may either be paid for SSG activities undertaken in excess of a normal workload or they may undertake SSG activities as part of their workload. In the latter case the staff member receives no additional payment, the funds generated being applied to supplementing the staffing of the department/s concerned so as to provide the capacity to undertake SSG contracts. An initial small seeding grant in 1984 from the College's Innovations Fund materially assisted the SSG's establishment.

ACTIVITIES

° Consultancy projects

The main consultancy activities undertaken during 1985 were:

(i) The carrying out of a student needs study and provision of follow-up consultancy assistance for the Participation and Equity Program Taskforce of Mansfield High School - a small rural school some 160 kilometres from Melbourne.

(ii) The planning and implementation of a program to improve classroom behaviour for McKillop College - a Catholic secondary school on the outskirts of Melbourne.

(iii) The development of a computer education program for Won Wron Primary School - a very small rural school about 240 kilometres from Melbourne.

(iv) An evaluation study relating to the mathematics program at Templestowe Park Primary School in the suburbs of Melbourne.

(v) A professional development program focussing on communication within the school community for Santa Maria College - a Catholic girls secondary school in an inner suburb.

(vi) Assistance with the carrying out of school community surveys for the Participation and Equity Program Taskforce at Mount Clear Technical High School in the provincial city of Ballarat.

(vii) Assistance to the school community of the suburban Alamein Primary School in seeking to plan for meeting the needs of its generally disadvantaged and declining school population.

In all these activities a major thrust has been the development of a close and cooperative working relationship with people - staff, parents and, in some cases, students - within the schools so that not only is there a sense of local ownership of the project, but those on-site have the opportunity of developing relevant skills. This approach is totally consistent with the principles expressed in the Ministerial Papers.

° Seminar series

In the first half of 1985 the School Support Group organised and hosted a series of six "School Management Seminars". These seminars, conducted on successive Wednesday evenings at the Toorak Campus, focussed on issues which had been identified as being current concerns of schools - most of them arising directly from the Ministerial Papers. Each seminar featured a small number of appropriate key-note speakers on the issue concerned, followed by illustrative case studies of good innovative practice. The latter were provided by the key actors themselves from schools which had been identified as having achieved significant progress in the particular facet of school activity which was the focus for that semimar. As well as being relevant and timely for participants, the seminars were a means of promoting the services available through the newly formed School Support Group.

° Publications

The School Support Group also produces a (now occasional) publication for schools - School Management.

BENEFITS

The establishment and operation of the School Support Group has had a number of benefits for both the College and the schools involved, as well as the mutual benefit of strengthening the links between teacher educators and the school systems.

° (a) Benefits for the College

(i)) Staff have been able to be involved "at the chalkface" in the exciting developments occurring in the schools: this is important to the image and credibility of the College as well as providing a rich source of experience which feeds back into College teaching.

(ii) Funds generated have in the main been used to effect modest additions to staffing thus extending and broadening the pool of expertise available to College students.

(iii) Staff locked into positions with little prospect of promotion in the current climate of negative growth in teacher education have the opportunity of new and stimulating experiences.

(iv) In some cases it has been appropriate to involve final year students in the projects, affording them valuable experience.

(b) Benefits for the Schools

(i) Schools are able to gain access to the knowledge, skills and experience of College staff to assist them in current initiatives. In most cases the developments which have stemmed from SSG involvement have been markedly enhanced by that involvement.

(ii) Skills of teachers, parents and students are enhanced through working collaboratively with the consultant/s and can be applied to subsequent activities within the school.

(iii) The "independent view" provided by the College consultant has in some cases led to consideration of aspects which would otherwise have been by-passed.

(iv) SSG has been able to apply the most appropriate College resources to the particular project and to maintain quality control.

DIFFICULTIES It would be misleading to convey the impression that the School Support Group initiative has been "all roses". Some of the difficulties encountered include:

(i) the expectation of schools that consultancy services come free;

(ii) restrictions on use of funds received by schools under various grants e.g. the Participation and Equity Program;

(iii) finding the blocks of time within busy people's teaching schedules to devote to the consultancy work;

(iv) developing and maintaining an awareness of the availability of the service;

(v) issues of who owns materials used in, or resulting from, the particular project.

While the provision of professional development and consultancy services to schools and related organisations by College staff has been going on for a long time, the establishment of the School Support Group has enabled this function to be carried out in a more coordinated and professional manner which has undoubtedly been to the benefit of both the providers and consumers of the services.

Appendix 1

Victoria College

Ref

Rusden Campus
662 Blackburn Road,
Clayton 3168
Victoria, Australia
Telephone: (03) 542 7444

centre for studies in the curriculum

Chairman: Mr J.M. Atkinson

The purpose of the Centre is to encourage the involvement of staff of Victoria College in advancing the study of curriculum and associated practices in educational and training agencies and to provide support for such involvement.

To attain this purpose the Centre initiates, encourages and supports

1. research into aspects of curriculum activity and thought;
2. development and publication of teaching and learning materials;
3. provision of consultative services in curriculum development and evaluation;
4. the participation of educational and training agencies in collaborative activities relevant to the purpose of the Centre;
5. the conducting of seminars and colloquia;
6. visits from scholars to enrich the work of the Centre and the College;
7. contact with institutions and groups having similar interests;
8. dissemination of innovative work in curriculum done by undergraduate and graduate students and staff of the institution.

Publications

The Centre has a policy of publishing the following materials from time to time:

- reports of research and evaluation studies
- occasional papers, including theoretical papers, case studies and discussion papers on various curriculum issues
- series of papers on particular topics
- curriculum materials for use at primary, secondary and tertiary level
- short stimulus papers containing curriculum ideas and suggestions for teachers.

Burwood Campus
221 Burwood Highway
Burwood Vic. 3125
Telephone: (03) 285 3333

Prahran Campus
142 High Street
Prahran Vic. 3181
Telephone: (03) 529 7788

Rusden Campus
662 Blackburn Road
Clayton Vic. 3168
Telephone: (03) 542 7444

Toorak Campus
336 Glenferrie Road
Malvern Vic. 3144
Telephone: (03) 285 3333

MAJOR PROJECTS AND PUBLICATIONS OF THE CENTRE FOR STUDIES IN THE CURRICULUM

MUNCH (Materials for the Understanding of Nutrition and Community Health)

Preparation of curriculum materials in nutrition and community health for students in primary and secondary schools (primary materials published by Victorian Dairy Industry Association, 1979; secondary materials completed and in publication: national distribution by CDC).

Co-ordinator: Geoff Trebilco Funding: Victorian Dairy Industry Authority

RAMP (Rusden Activity Mathematics Project)

Development of mathematics curriculum materials for school years seven and eight (available commercially).

Co-ordinator: Bruce Henry

RALPH (a project in Mathematics for Gifted Children)

Development of mathematics materials for gifted children. (Published 1980; available from the Centre.)

Co-ordinator: Bruce Henry

Q-CARDS (formerly HEARP: Home Economics Action Research Project)

Development of innovative starter cards for secondary school home ecnomics and related uses. (Published 1980; available from the Centre.)

Co-ordinator: Joan Walsh Funding support: Victorian In-service Education Committee

ATBEP (ASEP Talking Book Evaluation Project)

Evaluation of a talking book approach for use with ASEP materials by poor readers. (Completed 1978; report available from CDC.)

Co-ordinator: Geoff Beeson

EEC (Evaluation of 'Exploring Childhood')

Evaluation of the applicability of the 'Exploring Childhood' curriculum materials to Australian schools. (Completed 1981; report available from CDC.)

Co-ordinator: Noel Gough Funding: Curriculum Development Centre

PRIMARY-SECONDARY TRANSITION

Studies of transition from primary to secondary school and ways of facilitating educational continuity across the primary-secondary interface. (Report 'Aiding Transition from Primary to Secondary School' completed 1979; available from the Centre.)

Co-ordinator: John Atkinson

RMEXT

Development of a curriculum package (course plus materials) in research methods in education for use on a correspondence or other individualised basis by those involved in TAFE. (Completed 1981.)

Co-ordinator: Geoff Beeson Funding: TAFE

MILSCUP (Middle Level Skills Catch-up Project)

Investigation of the applicability of some recent research findings to the problem of overcoming specific deficiencies in the knowledge background of students beginning TAFE courses. (Completed 1977; report available from the Centre.)

Co-ordinator: Geoff Beeson Funding: TAFE

IF (Inventing the Future)

Development of across-the-curriculum materials inviting students to speculate about the future. (In progress.)

Co-ordinator: Noel Gough

BLOODSTREAM (Blood Study Teacher Resources and Educational Activity Materials)

Development of a set of across-the-curriculum secondary school materials relating to blood and the work of the Blood Bank. (Completed 1983; in publication by the Blood Bank.)

Co-ordinator: John Atkinson Funding: Red Cross Blood Bank

THE PEOPLE OF AUSTRALIA

A national curriculum materials project on population studies being carried out in co-operation with the Department of Educational Technology, Toorak Campus for the Federal Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs. (In progress.)

Co-ordinators: John Atkinson, Alex Millar and the Population Project Committee
Funding: Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs

PRIME MOVERS

A resource book of blackline masters providing practice and problems for junior secondary mathematics students. (Published 1984; commercial distribution through Objective Learning Materials, also available from the Centre.)

Co-ordinator: Bruce Henry
Funding: Participation and Equity Program

MINISTERIAL PAPER NO.6 AND SCHOOL PROJECT

Development of a set of resources to assist schools in the implementation of Ministerial Paper No.6, with particular reference to establishing processes and conditions conducive to achieving curriculum balance and coherence. (In progress.)

Co-ordinator: John Atkinson

SMALL RURAL POST-PRIMARY SCHOOLS CURRICULUM PROJECT

Investigation of effective ways of achieving program comprehensiveness for post-primary students in small schools, particularly in rural areas.

Co-ordinator: Robin Matthews
Funding: Country Education Project

SCIENCE BACKGROUND OF TRAINEE TEACHERS

A project in collaboration with the Australian Council for Educational Research involving the use of tests to monitor the scientific understanding of pre-service teacher trainees. (Commenced 1984.)

Co-ordinator: Clive Kings

LEARNING MATERIALS FOR ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

i) Recreation and You (1981)

ii) Low Energy Housing (1982)

Classroom units for the secondary school based on 35 mm transparency sets (published and distributed by Education Media Australia).

Co-ordinator: Olga MacKenzie

iii) Family Trees

An activity unit for the Decade of the Tree; appropriate to Home Economics and Environmental Studies. (Published 1982; distributed by HETTA and also available from the Centre.)

Co-ordinator: Noel Gough

RESOURCES FOR TEACHING PHYSICAL EDUCATION

i) Teaching Ideas for Major Sports

A compilation of activities for sports teaching. (In progress.)

ii) The Rusden Manual for Safety in Physical Education

Guidelines for the prevention of accidents in physical education. (In progress.)

Co-ordinator: Ken Alexander

SCHOOL CURRICULUM SERIES

i) School Review and Curriculum Development

Report of a one-day workshop for school personnel, featuring Daniel L. Stufflebeam, Director, Evaluation Center, Western Michigan University. (Available from the Centre; edited by John Atkinson; 1981.)

ii) Policies and Practices for School Evaluation in the Eighties

Comprehensive report of a one-day workshop for invited participants, featuring Daniel L. Stufflebeam, the addressing ways in which evaluation can be used to enhance the effectiveness of schools. (Available from the Centre; edited by John Atkinson and Geoff Beeson; 1981.)

iii) Strategies for School-Based Curriculum Development in Home Economics Education

A manual for use by teachers. (In trial form; publication due 1985.)

Co-ordinator: Noel Gough

EVALUATION SERVICES

i) Residential Accommodation Needs of Country Students Attending Inner Urban TAFE Colleges

A needs assessment study undertaken for the TAFE Inner Urban Study. (Undertaken and completed, 1982.)

Co-ordinators: John Atkinson and Elaine Atkinson Funding: TAFE Board

ii) Evaluation Services for the Spastic Society of Victoria

Provision of evaluation services directed towards the ongoing development of the work of the Spastic Society's schools and other facilities throughout Victoria. (Commenced 1984.)

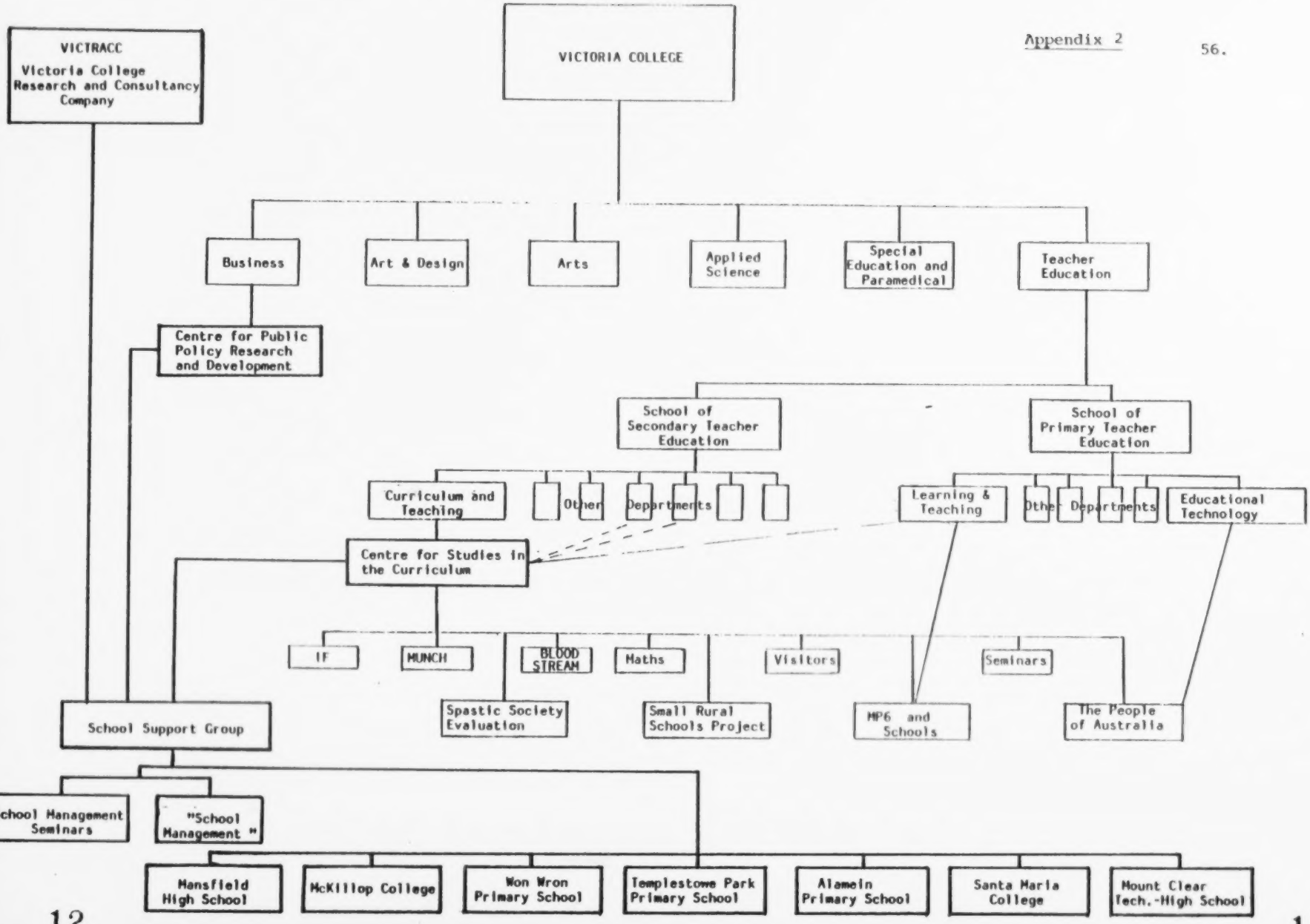
Co-ordinator: Geoff Trebilco Funding: Spastic Society of Victoria

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND CONSULTANCY SERVICES

School Support Group

Provision of professional development programs and consultancy services to schools and other educational agencies and groups: a co-operative enterprise with the Centre for Public Policy Research and Development and offered through VICTRACC Ltd. (Commenced as a formal initiative in late 1984: 10 completed or current projects as at July, 1985.)

Co-ordinators: John Atkinson and Ron Fitzgerald Funding: Victoria College Innovation Grant and client schools.


VICTRACC
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VICTORIA COLLEGE
Business
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Arts
Applied Science
Special Education and Paramedical
Teacher Education
Centre for Public Policy Research and Development
School of Secondary Teacher Education
School of Primary Teacher Education
Curriculum and Teaching
Other Departments
Learning & Teaching
Other Departments
Educational Technology
Centre for Studies in the Curriculum
IF
MUNCH
BLOOD STREAM
Maths
Visitors
Seminars
School Support Group
Spastic Society Evaluation
Small Rural Schools Project
MP6 and Schools
The People of Australia
School Management Seminars
"School Management "
Mansfield High School
McKillop College
Won Wron Primary School
Templestowe Park Primary School
Alamein Primary School
Santa Maria College
Mount Clear Tech.-High School